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491 the wide valley, so the patches of cultivated land increased in number. On the way we had only seen the road coolies at work —always in pairs, for one holds the handle of the shovel and the other the length of rope which is tied down near to the spade, as it takes two men to move a shovel full of hard rock—and the few men of the valley who were trudging the long road home so that they might save a few extra rupees to give their families after working on the other side of the mountains for months. We had also met odd parties of three or four men and women with great trusses of grass on their heads; from where they were coming or where going we could not imagine.

At the foot of the mountains, as the road flattened out, so the surface became smooth; no longer was the hard grip necessary; it was now difficult to find a patch of ground which was not under cultivation, each tiny field being divided from its neighbour by loose stone walls. Then we came on the terraced rice fields, with a stream, which could be diverted to any of them by damming it with stones, bouncing and sparkling over the rock bed. A few black buffaloes were grazing by the roadside under the eye of a couple of boys, whose one thrill in life seemed to be had by placing a stick across the road so that cars might crush it.

[494] Just before the village of Banihal, there is the toll post, after
[495] which come the houses, shops and the Dak bungalow, whilst here, when we filled up with petrol we found it cost a rupee a gallon less than in the Valley, such is the expense of the journey over the Pass.

From Banihal to Ramban, at a height of about five thousand feet, is a distance of twenty-three miles; there are few who do not consider this to be the most lovely stage of the route. For miles on end the road, which in this part is the original one, runs hundreds of feet above the river Chenab, but the valley is narrow, the grey rock on either side steep; the little valleys which come down to join that in which run river and road are thick with trees, as also are some of the more gentle slopes, but where they are not, the grey and blue shadings of the rocks add to the beauty of the glorious scene. In parts the giant rocks hang over the road, which on its other side is protected by a stone wall from the precipitous drop to the river. Occasionally a stream rushes down from above, in places it becomes a

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sible to keep my eyes on the road and away from the magnificent views as we climbed up through blue and grey cedars, tall firs and straight pines, the ground strewn with their cones and needles, the scent in the air glorious. As though to tempt the tourist to stop a while to enjoy to the full all that is about him, on many of the bends the road has been widened so that a car can be parked, for it is the ideal place for the picnic lunch or tea as you look down on the forest-covered hills, the silver river lost for a distance behind their beautiful multicoloured branches and high in the background the snow-covered mountain tops, sharply separated by their whiteness from the clear blue of the sky.

The rest house at Kud sits just above the road, and although the furnishings were far from up to hotel standard, food of a kind was to be had there, and so we stopped the night, to awaken next morning to walk out on to the covered verandah and look across to the distant hills, over the mist which still clung to the valley between. Like most of these rest houses and Dak bungalows, which are usually quite old buildings, it has been beautifully sited for tourists but is not comfortable enough to encourage them to linger long. This was to be the last night on which blankets would be required on the bed.

From here down to Udhampur is a distance of twenty-five miles, the road gradually dropping, with many hairpin bends; but still the country clings to its trees, although as the latitude becomes lower, so the sweet-smelling pines and the firs are replaced by others. From among the barren red rocks great bushes grow, and when we were there they were all in bloom, the most fascinating being a mass of pink wax-like flowers, the leaves narrow, long and glossy, and when we stopped we found small clumps of wild strawberries in those parts of the road which held more vegetation. Still the road was with the river.

Most of the little towns we had passed through had consisted of long bazaars, always with many "hotels" which are really restaurants. Here and there on the bend of the road, beneath shady trees and close to a stream or a spring these were the odd tea shops, their sign of trade as always, being rows of cups and saucers and tiny tea pots, for each customer has his own pot; whilst behind them is a great clay stove with a kettle always